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THE  
MISFORTUNES  
OF  
ELPHIN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF HEADLONG HALL.

*Thomas Carr, Esq.*

Unlooked-for good betides us still,  
And unanticipated ill :  
Blind Fortune rules the hours that roll :  
Then fill with good old wine the bowl.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY THOMAS HOOKHAM,  
OLD BOND STREET.

1829.

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**THE**  
**MISFORTUNES OF ELPHIN.**

Quod non expectes ex transverso fit,  
Et suprà nos Fortuna negotia curat:  
Quare da nobis vina Falerna, puer.

**PETRONIUS ARBITER.**

J. and C. Adlard, Printers,  
Bartholomew Close.

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# THE MISFORTUNES OF ELPHIN.

## CHAP. I.

### THE PROSPERITY OF GWAELOD.

Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,  
That, hush'd in grim repose, expects his evening prey.

GRAY.

IN the beginning of the sixth century, when Uther Pendragon held the nominal sovereignty of Britain over a number of petty kings, Gwythno Garanhir was king of Cardigan. The most valuable portion of his dominions was the Great Plain of Gwaelod, an extensive tract of level land, stretching along

that part of the sea-coast which now belongs to the counties of Merioneth and Cardigan. This district was populous and highly cultivated. It contained sixteen fortified towns, superior to all the towns and cities of the Cymry, excepting *Caer Lleon* upon *Usk*; and, like *Caer Lleon*, they bore in their architecture, their language, and their manners, vestiges of past intercourse with the Roman lords of the world. It contained also one of the three privileged ports of the isle of Britain, which was called the Port of *Gwythno*. This port, we may believe if we please, had not been unknown to the Phœnicians and Carthaginians, when they visited the island for metal, accommodating the inhabitants, in return, with luxuries which they would not otherwise have dreamed of, and which they could very well have done without; of course, in arranging the exchange of what they deno-

minated equivalents, imposing on their simplicity, and taking advantage of their ignorance, according to the approved practice of civilized nations; which they called imparting the blessings of Phœnician and Carthaginian light.

An embankment of massy stone protected this lowland country from the sea, which was said, in traditions older than the embankment, to have, in occasional spring-tides, paid short but unwelcome visits to the interior inhabitants, and to have, by slow aggressions, encroached considerably on the land. To prevent the repetition of the first of these inconveniences, and to check the progress of the second, the people of Gwaelod had built the stony rampart, which had withstood the shock of the waves for centuries, when Gwythno began his reign.

Gwythno, like other kings, found the business of governing too light a matter to fill up the vacancy of either his time or his head, and took to the more solid pursuits of harping and singing ; not forgetting feasting, in which he was glorious ; nor hunting, wherein he was mighty. His several pursuits composed a very harmonious triad. The chase conducted to the good cheer of the feast, and to the good appetite which consumed it ; the feast inspired the song ; and the song gladdened the feast, and celebrated the chase.

Gwythno and his subjects went on together very happily. They had little to do with him but to pay him revenue, and he had little to do with them but to receive it. Now and then they were called on to fight for the protection of his sacred person, and for the

privilege of paying revenue to him rather than to any of the kings in his vicinity, a privilege of which they were particularly tenacious. His lands being far more fertile, and his people, consequently, far more numerous, than those of the rocky dwellers on his borders, he was always victorious in the defensive warfare to which he restricted his military achievements; and, after the invaders of his dominions had received two or three inflictions of signal chastisement, they limited their aggressions to coming quietly in the night, and vanishing, before morning, with cattle: an heroic operation, in which the preeminent glory of Scotland renders the similar exploits of other nations not worth recording.

Gwythno was not fond of the sea: a moonstruck bard had warned him to beware

of the oppression of Gwenhidwy;\* and he thought he could best do so by keeping as far as possible out of her way. He had a palace built of choice slate stone on the rocky banks of the Mawddach, just above the point where it quitted its native mountains, and entered the plain of Gwaelod. Here, among green woods and sparkling waters, he lived in festal munificence, and expended his revenue in encouraging agriculture, by consuming a large quantity of produce.

Watchtowers were erected along the émbankment, and watchmen were appointed to guard against the first approaches of damage or decay. The whole of these

\* *Gwen-hudiw*, "the white alluring one:" the name of a mermaid. Used figuratively for the elemental power of the sea.

*per*

towers, and their companies of guards, were subordinate to a central castle, which commanded the sea-port already mentioned, and wherein dwelt Prince Seithenyn ap Seithyn Saidi, who held the office of Arglwyd Gorgarcheidwad yr Argae Breninawl, which signifies, in English, Lord High Commissioner of Royal Embankment; and he executed it as a personage so denominated might be expected to do: he drank the profits, and left the embankment to his deputies, who left it to their assistants, who left it to itself.

The condition of the head, in a composite as in a simple body, affects the entire organization to the extremity of the tail, excepting that, as the tail in the figurative body usually receives the largest share in the distribution of punishment, and the smallest in the distribution of reward, it has the stronger

stimulus to ward off evil, and the smaller supply of means to indulge in diversion; and it sometimes happens that one of the least regarded of the component parts of the said tail will, from a pure sense of duty, or an inveterate love of business, or an oppressive sense of ennui, or a development of the organ of order, or some other equally cogent reason, cheerfully undergo all the care and labour, of which the honour and profit will redound to higher quarters.

Such a component portion of the Gwaelod High Commission of Royal Embankment was Teithrin ap Tathral, who had the charge of a watchtower where the embankment terminated at the point of Mochres, in the high land of Ardudwy. Teithrin kept his portion of the embankment in exemplary condition, and paced with daily care the limits of his charge; but one day, by some

accident, he strayed beyond them, and observed symptoms of neglect that filled him with dismay. This circumstance induced him to proceed till his wanderings brought him round to the embankment's southern termination in the high land of Caredigion. He met with abundant hospitality at the towers of his colleagues, and at the castle of Seithenyn : he was supposed to be walking for his amusement ; he was asked no questions, and he carefully abstained from asking any. He examined and observed in silence ; and, when he had completed his observations, he hastened to the palace of Gwythno.

Preparations were making for a high festival, and Gwythno was composing an ode. Teithrin knew better than to interrupt him in his *awen*.\*

\* The rapturous and abstracted state of poetical inspiration.